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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of pop, rock, and folk music in foreign language teaching. Modern music represents an idiom familiar to a broad span of young people, and has an important place in the life of students ranging in age from ten to thirty-five years of age. It also tends to follow and comment on the important trends of modern society. Songs can be used as presentation contexts, as reinforcement material, and for cultural education. A specific outline of how to use songs in teaching English as a second language is presented. Songs with regional or ethnic varieties of English, and songs with internal sound changes are useful in the teaching of phonological patterns. The grammatical aspect can be looked at with songs having repetition, substitution, or internal pattern rearrangement. Story or narrative songs, performative songs, show and film songs, and songs that focus on ideas or cultural themes, such as flight from the cities, drug experiences, ecology, the generation gap, and ethnic America, are useful in teaching the semantic aspects of the language. (CLK)

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AN OVERLOOKED RESOURCE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: POP, ROCK, AND FOLK MUSIC*

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The TESOL profession, during the past few years, has heard a variety of recommendations which have all pointed out that second language learners want and need to utilize materials which reflect real life concerns. So, for example, at last year's TESOL convention constructive outlines were presented for including various mass media in an English language course. Concrete proposals were offered relating to newspapers, comic strips, television, and documentary films as teaching contexts.

The purpose of this paper is to give a further suggestion in this ongoing discussion of the utilization of relevant and lively materials in the ESL classroom. I would like to offer (more than that, strongly advocate) what, I believe, has been an overlooked resource, at least one which has been overlooked by the establishment in our profession. I refer to the whole genre of popular music, or pop, rock, and folk.

My primary reason for suggesting contemporary music as material for language instruction is because it represents an idiom which is familiar to a broad span of young people -- and not just those living within the United States. I have found that pop, rock, and folk is widely known and embraced by students both in academic and non-academic settings, both within this country and in most other even superficially westernized places in the world. In those regions where governmental pressure frowns on it, the international field of pop-rock has become, probably by virtue of its exclusion, the forbidden but highly prized fruit.

A second reason for this strong advocacy: For the student who roughly falls into the span of years from 10 to 35 (but a person's age, I suppose, is really a state of mind), modern music represents quite a different element in life than do the other mass media which have been recommended for inclusion in our language courses. Most newspapers, TV programs, and the majority of commercial films do not hold out the same generational pull which pop-rock represents. What power structure the music business does possess is somehow not a simple duplication of the establishment press or network television. In many

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ways, too, culture heroes who play such important roles in the music scene do not have counterparts of the same magnitude among newspaper syndicated columnists or even funny paper characters.

Furthermore, embedded in a great deal of the pop music of our times is persistent attention to the important trends of modern society. The songs of modern troubadors such as Judy Collins, Paul Simon, James Taylor and many others often turn out to be the examples of English language which are familiar already to young people who want to learn and improve their knowledge of English. These songs turn out to be the material in English which students want to understand; they want to be able to sing along. So, why not help them by bringing pop, rock, and folk into the ESL course curriculum?

My own conviction of the effectiveness of pop, rock, and folk has come about not as a result of knowing this music as a member of the culture which so strongly identifies with it. Rather, I'm a generational outsider who, with highbrow leanings a few years ago would wince at anything which sounded vaguely like rock. When I began to turn off my generational bias and try to tune in on the themes and modes of contemporary music, I discovered that a significant revolution in the field of pop music had been taking place during the late 1950's and 1960's. Along with important developments which can be described from a strictly musicological point of view, for people like myself interested in the content of these songs, I found that the revolution had brought about a new focus on the idea -- the message really mattered. The singer usually wrote his own material. This material, in its best examples, offered inventive, imaginative use of the English language.

I should stop here and candidly admit that I do not want to imply that pop, rock, and folk is completely overlooked by the TESOL profession. In fact, some of the suggestions for utilizing it in the classroom have come to me from rank and file teachers. I find there is a definite underground recognition of the strong appeal which modern music holds for students. Further, I do not wish to imply that our profession has overlooked the enjoyment which students can receive from singing -- from learning songs in the new language. There are some worthwhile sources available which concentrate their attention on traditional songs for language instruction. Frequently though, these suggestions put their major emphasis on selections which are appropriate for children.

The TESL literature includes statements, as well, regarding the effectiveness of writing original songs for the language classroom. This, too, is an earnest and interesting suggestion. However, I do not believe that either the teacher's own efforts nor a textbook writer's songs written for pedagogical objectives alone hold out the same pull of generational identification which a recording of a name entertainer can evoke.

Too, often, teachers have viewed singing as an end of the day activity, something to do when the serious business of language instruction has been completed. The suggestions I want to make here for the inclusion of pop, rock,

folk material pushes the learning of songs to the top of the priority list. Songs can be utilized as presentation contexts, as reinforcement material, as vehicles through which to teach all of the language skills, as a medium through which to present some of the most important cultural themes which pervade language and modern life.

I can recall, during an earlier era in the language teaching profession, when sound pedagogical advice warned against songs for language instruction. Taking its cue from a theory of language which was primarily concerned with performance or surface features of language, this admonition pointed out how, in most instances, song material gives learners an incorrect model of spoken language since the song-writer is free to distort normal intonation in order to comply with the requirements of the rhythmic pattern of the musical line or phrase. At face value, this statement is true enough. However, we now look upon the knowledge which the learner must acquire from quite a different perspective. Today's concern with both the semantic element in language and the motivational requirements for successful learning go a long way towards overriding some of those earlier, simplistic warnings.

Now, I want to present an outline of pop, rock, folk material which will suggest ways to use the idiom in language teaching. The outline, or typology, has been compiled with primary attention to the three components of language, namely the phonological, syntactic and semantic areas. A fuller treatment would indicate how the components of language substance into which songs are grouped here can be tied to the specific language skills, namely those of listening-comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. A fuller typology would also point out in far greater detail those aspects of social meaning which can be illustrated by means of pop, rock, and folk material.

Throughout this discussion, I have assumed that the model which students hear and sing along with is the same recorded material which they listen to outside of the classroom. For it seems to be the case that an important part of the appeal inherent in this music comes from the sound of familiar singers and their particular arrangements. In order to facilitate this method of presentation, the tape recorder is an indispensable aid. Songs for classroom practice can be copied from original recordings by means of a tape-deck, and the best source of records is to borrow them from students themselves.

A second important ingredient is to provide students with song sheets containing the lyrics. The presence of the taped music plus the song sheet leaves the teacher free to be just another participant, not necessarily the leader or conductor of singing. Our concern is primarily directed towards the language contained in the selections. Our abilities to sing per se are relatively unimportant. So, for example, a helpful technique is for the teacher to use those spans of time occupied by musical bridges on the tape to talk the words of the song just before we hear them being sung.

THE OUTLINE

I. Selections which emphasize phonological aspects of language:

(1) Material which clearly contrasts particular regional or ethnic varieties of English in order to help learners become familiar with their special characteristics. For example: Can they hear the distinctively different pronunciation of the Beatles contrasted with country-western selections?

(2) Sandhi songs, or songs with internal sound changes. These are examples which help students hear and understand some of the characteristics of fast speech: The palatalized sounds of woudja, couldja; the i/n/g sound in goin', talkn', singin'; the reduced vowel sound in ta go, ta talk, ta sing. Examples of sandhi songs are very easy to find. Carly Simon's version of 'The Right Thing Ta Do' or the Beatles' 'Act Naturally' are two good ones. There are hundreds of others.

(3) Songs for teaching stress timed rhythm of English speech: These are lyrics which progressively add more syllables to the same repeated musical phrase, thus forcing the learner to adjust to the demands of uneven rhythm in English. An outstanding example is the introductory song on an early Beatles album called 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.' The album is called by the same name.

II. Next, some suggestions of types which focus on grammatical patterns:

(1) Repetition songs: These are examples which contain either single words, sentences, or short choruses which are repeated throughout the whole selection. They lend themselves for use with beginning level students. They are also quite easy to locate. A few examples: 'It Takes A Worried Man To Sing A Worried Song,' or the Byrds' 'Turn, Turn, Turn' (single word repetition), or Lenon and McCartney's 'Let It Be' (sentence repetition).

(2) Substitution songs: These are examples which have a minimal change occurring within a basic sentence pattern which is repeated throughout the whole selection. A few examples likely to be familiar to all: 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone?' or the folk song 'If I Had a Hammer.' In 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone?' the progression of change within the frame sentence moves from flowers in 'Where Have All The Flowers Gone?' to young girls, to husbands, to soldiers, to graveyards and then back to flowers. This selection is a particularly good example, too, because the last two lines of each verse cue the up-coming substitution word.

(3) Focused grammatical structure songs: Members in this category are not quite as easy to locate. That is why upon finding a good example you experience something of a four-leaf clover reaction. Such was my immediate feeling when I first heard Simon and Garfinkel's 'El Condor Pasa:'

I'd rather be a sparrow than a snail
Yes, I would, if I could, I surely would.

I'd rather be a hammer than a nail
Yes, I would, if I could, I surely would.

Focused grammatical structure songs contain repreated examples of the same pattern. It seems to be the case that the most frequently occurring grammatical topics in this group are modal verbs and the perfect tenses. But it is possible to discover more obscure types as well. There is a fine song filled with examples of two-word verbs by Joni Mitchell. It is called 'Michael From Mountains:'

> Michael wakes you up with sweets
> He takes you up streets and the rain comes down
> Sidewalk markets locked up tight
> And umbrellas bright on a grey background
> There's oil on the puddles in taffeta patterns
> That run down the drain in colored arrangements
> That Michael will change with a stick that he found.

'Michael' is a useful example because it contains contrasts between the pattern: Verb + particle (or two-word verb) as in wake up, come down, lock up, opposed to prepositional phrases, as in on the puddles, in taffeta patterns.

(4) Internal pattern rearrangement: This type is closely tied to substitution songs; however, the internal process of change -- occurring either by means of addition, substitution, deletion or rearrangement of elements -- is more complex. One sub-group of internal pattern rearrangement carries the task of supplying part of the lyric to the participants. I am referring to songs which set up a pattern and then ask the audience to add whole lines or line endings to complete the chorus. There are a number of good examples in the folk song literature. For example: 'Oh, you can't get to heaven on roller skates, you'll roll right by those pearly gates . . . . . I ainta gonna grieve my lord no more.' A good pop model for this type is Dave Mason's 'You Can All Join In:'

> Here's a little song you can all join in with
> It's very simple and I hope it's new
> Make your own words up if you want to
> Any old words will do.
>
> Yellow, blue, what'll I do?
> Maybe I'll just sit here thinkin'
> Black, white, stop the fight
> Does one of those colors ever bother you?

III. The third group concentrates on the semantic or meaning aspect of language:

(1) Story or narrative songs: These make excellent material for incorporation into lessons which stress speaking skills. A plan can move from: Listen to the song / understand the story-line / tell us what happened, or 'who did what to whom?' Of course, the activity can be carried out with many intervening, preparatory steps. It is not difficult to find examples in this category: 'Kisses Sweeter Than Wine;' 'The Lemon Tree' (a pop version of a folk song); the currently polular 'Taxi' sung by Harry Chapin; 'The Streets of Laredo;' and many more.

(2) Performative songs: We usually consider them appropriate for children only, but adult language learners can practice listening-comprehension skills by performing the action which the song lyric asks for, just as children do. Some examples are: Woody Guthrie's 'Put Your Finger in The Air' and the well-known favorite, 'Do the Hokey Pokey.'

(3) Show songs and film songs: The value of including selections from this category lies in the fact that the learners, if they are already familiar with the source of the song, are able to place it in the context of a story, one with which they have visual or emotional associations. Songs from motion pictures which have been widely distributed are likely candidates. For example, such films as West Side Story, The Sound of Music, and The King and I. Know your students and find out what songs in this category they want to learn. I was surprized to find that within a group of Japanese teachers visiting Los Angeles for a workshop recently most of them were at least familiar with the song 'Sunrise, Sunset' from Fiddler On The Roof.

(4) Overall idea songs: In some ways this is the most significant category. These are songs which make a comment about life, the world we live in, our place and time in this universe. One sub-set in the group includes songs which tend to have universal qualities in their motives. Everyone, no matter of what cultural background, can identify with songs which express common human emotions of love, despair, exhilaration, loneliness, etc. Selections such as the Beatles' 'Yesterday;' or 'Five Hundred Miles' (a vintage Peter, Paul and Mary pop-folk number); Simon and Garfinkel's 'Bridge Over Troubled Water;' Cat Stevens' 'Morning Has Broken.' There are literally hundreds of others which express universal human feelings in clear, vivid language.

Another group in this category of overall idea songs is more particularized. But its appeal is intense and far reaching. If one were to make a list of the half dozen or so high frequency topics relating to values, beliefs and concerns of young people today, both within the United States and beyond, one would probably find that list duplicated in the contents of a large segment of the pop-rock library. Elaboration of both the themes themselves and songs which delineate them is worth another twenty minutes. I do not have that time. Here, then, is simply an open-ended list of culture themes -- remember, it is a list, not a hierarchy -- and songs which illustrate some of the topics:

a. The theme of personal authenticity, illustrated by Leonard Cohen's 'Like A Bird On The Wire.'

> Like a bird on the wire
> Like a worm on the hook
> Like a drunk in a midnight choir.
>
> I have tried in my way to be free
> I have saved all my ribbons for thee . . .

b. The theme of flight from the cities, of reaching out for more natural things in life.

c. The ecology theme: Joni Mitchell in 'Big Yellow Taxi' says:

They paved paradise and put up a parking lot
Took all the trees and put them in a museum
And they charged all the people a dollar and a half to see them.

or Cat Stevens':

We've come a long way
We're changin' day to day
But tell me: where do the children play?

d. The theme of misunderstanding between generations: Crosby, Stills and Nash sing in 'Teach Your Children:'

You who are on the road must have
a code that you can live by.
And so, become yourself because the
past is just a goodby.
Teach your children well their
father's hell will slowly go by.
And feed them on your dream
the one they picked the one you'll know by.
Don't you ever ask them why
if they told you you would cry.
So, just look at them and sigh
and know they love you.

e. The theme of the drug experience: Bob Dylan illustrates it in 'Mr. Tambourine Man:'

Take me on a trip
upon your magic swirling ship
All my senses have been stripped
and my hands can't feel to grip
My toes too numb to step
wait only for my boot heels to go wandrin'.

f. The theme of mystic, psychological orientation: In 'Vincent' with allusions to the work of Vincent Van Gogh, Don McClean begins 'starry, starry night.'

g. The Black experience in America, movingly illustrated by the rock and soul magic of Stevie Wonder in songs such as 'Livin' for the City.'

h. The theme of personal feelings, of looking and searching inward:

Bob Dylan expresses it in 'Most Likely.'

I'm gonna let you pass
and I'll go last
Then time will tell
just who fell
And who's been left behind,
When you go your way
and I'll go mine.

I hope these suggestions have been enough to turn you in the direction of regarding pop, rock, and folk as serious material for inclusion in English language courses. I hope you are ready to look for songs which work for you and your students.

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